

cavalier '. Carlyle maintained not only that the charge was unjust, but that Henry Cromwell was an able and upright statesman. Both disputants were equally vigorous and voluble ; but, not pretending to have any independent opinion on the question, I observed that Carlyle referred to many contemporary authorities, while Lord Macaulay, at the end of every rhetorical period, invariably reverted to Mrs. Hutchinson and her deboshed cavalier. ' I have read', Carlyle once answered, not without impatience, 'all that that shrill female ever wrote, and I can assert that she knew nothing of Henry Cromwell. I have read every existing letter which he wrote, and all that is written about him, and know that he was not a deboshed cavalier/ The only other speaker who intervened was Sir George Lewis, whose sceptical instinct never failed him. In answer to Carlyle's argument from the letters he suggested that Henry Cromwell, when he was Lord Deputy in Ireland, probably saved himself the trouble of writing, by merely signing letters written by his secretary. I forget whether Lord Macaulay accepted the aid of his unexpected ally.¹

In this case Carlyle was absolutely right and Macaulay absolutely wrong; the latter had formed a positive opinion on imperfect data, and adhered to it with as much tenacity as if it had been formed after a study of all the evidence.

Why did Macaulay do this? A historian can make no greater mistake than forming his opinions too soon. When

he begins to study a subject his opinions are bound to be more or less provisional, to be altered and modified as he obtains more evidence and larger light. Does not Milton in *Areopagitica* say that opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making?

A historian is not bound to make up his mind in a hurry : he can wait till he knows or has good reason for thinking he

¹ G. S. Venables, *Carlyle in Society and at Home*, in *Fortnightly Review*, xxxix. 632.